

## Clinical Laboratory Personnel Shortage Update

by Leonard Kargacin, DOH/LQA

**A**n increasing number of students are graduating from the clinical laboratory training programs in Washington and entering the workforce!

The clinical laboratory training programs in Washington are graduating more students for entry into the workforce!

The Clinical Laboratory Advisory Council's Laboratory Personnel Shortage Workgroup is composed of the Program Directors of the seven clinical laboratory training programs in Washington, representatives from the laboratory professional organizations in the state, and members from the Advisory Council. The most recent meeting of the Workgroup was held on December 1, 2006. The following is a summary of that meeting:

**Current Program Statistics:** Each program director provided information about the number of graduates in 2005 and 2006, their current enrollment, and their student capacity. For the Clinical Laboratory Scientist (CLS) / Medical Technology (MT) programs, there were 39 graduates in 2006 and 41 graduates in 2005. For comparison purposes, there were 33 graduates in 2000. There are 41 students in this year's class with a total capacity for 45 students.

For the Clinical Laboratory Technician (CLT) / Medical Laboratory Technician (MLT) programs, there were 40 graduates in 2006 and 41 graduates in 2005. For comparison purposes, there were 31 graduates in 2000. There are

64 students in this year's class with a total capacity for 83 students.

**New CLT/MLT Program:** Renton Technical College (RTC) started a new associate degree CLT/MLT training program in 2006. The first graduates from the program will enter the job market in 2007. The RTC program has a total capacity for 22 students with seven students in the first class. Michael Sealfon, PhD is the program director of the CLT/MLT program at RTC.

**Training Program Strengths:** The program directors listed the following as strengths of their programs:

- All programs have dedicated faculty and good administration support.
- Students rotate through a variety of clinical sites so they are exposed to a variety of real-life laboratory operations.

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### Practice Guidelines

The following practice guidelines have been developed by the Clinical Laboratory Advisory Council. They can be accessed at the following website:  
[www.doh.wa.gov/lqa.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/lqa.htm)

Anemia	Lipid Screening
ANA	PAP Smear
Bioterrorism Event Mgmt	Point-of-Care Testing
Bleeding Disorders	PSA
Chlamydia	Rash Illness
Diabetes	Red Cell Transfusion
Group A Strep Pharyngitis	Renal Disease
Group B Streptococcus	STD
Hepatitis	Thyroid
HIV	Tuberculosis
Infectious Diarrhea	Urinalysis
Intestinal Parasites	Wellness

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- Student recruitment efforts have paid off with an increase in the number of applicants wanting to enter the programs.
- Some of the programs have developed a mechanism where people who have been out of the field for a time can enroll in their programs to enhance their skills and update their knowledge base.
- The community colleges, Wenatchee Valley College and Shoreline Community College in particular, are expanding the number of various on-line education options available to students.

**Training Program Challenges:** The main challenge facing all of the training programs is finding enough clinical sites for their current students and increasing the number of clinical sites so that the programs can increase their student capacity.

Teaching challenges for the programs include finding enough abnormal specimens (especially abnormal differentials) available to the student at the clinical sites, exposing the students to new testing technologies, and finding additional instructors. In addition, there are an increasing

number of students entering the programs with English as a second language. Programs are trying to enhance their distance learning capabilities so that students have to spend as much time on campus.

Programs are also interested in obtaining feedback from employers to help them determine if what they are teaching the students is meeting the needs of the community.

**Number of Applicants:** The number of applications received from students wanting to enter the training programs has increased over the past few years. The programs are thus able to select their students from a larger applicant pool which has increased the caliber of the students.

**Healthcare Personnel Shortage Survey:** The Health Work Force Institute and the Washington State Hospital Association conducted a health care worker vacancy survey of Washington hospitals in 2006. The report is titled: "Vacancies Increasing: Results of the 2006 Hospital Work Force Survey." The full report can be obtained from the following websites: <http://www.hwfi.org> or <http://www.wsha.org>.

Report highlights include:

- ✓ Hospitals spend \$122 million dollars per year state-wide on contract labor.
- ✓ The overall vacancy rate for MLT/CLT in 2005 was 7.7% and 10.5% in 2006, a 36.4% increase.
- ✓ The overall vacancy rate for MT/CLS in 2005 was 3.5% and 5.4% in 2006, a 54.3% increase.
- ✓ The number of MLT/CLTs employed in hospitals in Washington is 485 (377 FTE) and the number of MT/CLS employed in hospitals is 1204 (935 FTE).
- ✓ Difficulty in recruitment:
  - MT/CLS: 41% of the respondents said recruitment was very difficult compared to 30% in 2005.
  - MLT/CLT: 21% of the respondents said recruitment was very difficult compared with 26% in 2005.
  - 21% (15% in 2005) of Washington hospitals said they were using contract MT/CLS and 15% (12% in 2005) were using contract MLT/CLT.
- ✓ Health care industry is estimated to have 43,000 workers over the age of 55 (14% of its workforce).
- ✓ The average age of MT/CLS is 43.7 years.
- ✓ The average number of months required to recruit for the position that has been vacant the longest state-wide for MT/CLS is 4.3 months and for MLT/CLT is 2.8 months.

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**Website addresses:**

**DOH home page:** <http://www.doh.wa.gov>

**LQA home page:** <http://www.doh.wa.gov/lqa.htm>

**PHL home page:**

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/PHL/default.htm>

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**Center of Excellence for Allied Health:** The Center of Excellence for Allied Health for Washington was established in 2006 and is funded by the Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges and the Legislature. The Center is a statewide resource clearing house for the Allied Health professions and is located at Yakima Valley Community College.

The Center started a health occupations website in the Spring of 2006 called WAHOTT (Washington Health Opportunities for Today and Tomorrow). The website address is <http://www.wahott.com>. The website targets middle and high school students to provide information about health occupations.

The Center is doing a two-year pilot project to find ways to work with hospital administrators to help alleviate the nursing shortage. If the pilot project is successful, it will be expanded to other health professions.

**Career Recruitment Tools:** The Personnel Shortage Workgroup updated its laboratory career recruitment tools to encourage students to enter the clinical laboratory science professions. The **Laboratory Science Profession** brochure highlights the profession and training requirements. Washington training program information is listed on the back. This information on the following website: <http://www.labcareers.org>. The “**What career choices do I have with a science major?**” document provides more in depth information about the various clinical laboratory science professions and lists the clinical laboratory science training programs in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. A PowerPoint presentation is also available at no charge to those making laboratory career recruitment presentations to the high schools. Contact Leonard Kargacin ([leonard.kargacin@doh.wa.gov](mailto:leonard.kargacin@doh.wa.gov)) if you would like a copy of this presentation.

**Washington State Health Care Personnel Shortage Task Force** priorities for 2006 include: Collect data on the supply of health care practitioners; Expand capacity of high demand health care education and training programs; Support skills panels with additional funding; Increase health care workforce diversity; Increase faculty availability by providing salaries that are competitive with industry; Develop health care career pathway programs in K-12; and Develop transferable core curricula and articulation pathways. For more Information about the Task Force, go onto their website at <http://www.wtb.wa.gov>.

**Clinical Site Summit Meeting:** The Workgroup is exploring the feasibility of hosting a summit meeting with hospital administrators centered on the importance of acting as a clinical site for the training programs. It was thought that a meeting with hospital administrators would be beneficial since their support is crucial in encouraging their department managers to volunteer to act as a training site for students. With administration support and commitment, the laboratory manager should be more willing to take students or to take additional students even in times of staff shortages. The Workgroup is meeting in late January to strategize about this meeting.

### What can I do to help?

- Employers can offer student tuition reimbursement programs for their employees.
- Clinical Sites can offer student tuition reimbursement to students in the various training programs. The tuition reimbursement could be offered via an open competition of interested students. The student would receive tuition reimbursement in exchange for a service commitment at the facility.
- It is hard for students to participate in clinical site rotations that are located at the more distant sites from their college or university. It would be helpful if these more distant sites could offer support for the students with travel expenses and/or housing, etc., while the student is on-site. This would encourage students to accept clinical site rotations at distant sites.

## Laboratory Career Recruitment

Have you been asked to give a presentation to students about careers in the clinical laboratory? The Clinical Laboratory Personnel Shortage Workgroup has developed a free PowerPoint presentation that you can use to make the job easier.

The presentation titled “*CSI: Clinical Science Investigation*” includes information about laboratory testing, education requirements, and salary information. For more information contact Leonard Kargacin by phone at (206) 418-5416 or by e-mail at [leonard.kargacin@doh.wa.gov](mailto:leonard.kargacin@doh.wa.gov).

## MTS Relicensing

**Current MTS licenses will expire on June 30, 2007.**

**Relicensing applications will be mailed in March or April 2007. Licenses will be renewed for the 2-year period July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2009.**

**More information about relicensing will appear in the March issue of Elaborations.**

### Calendar of Events

#### PHL Training Classes:

(<http://www.doh.wa.gov/ehsphl/phl/training/train.htm>)

#### Advanced Blood Cell Morphology Course

March 14 or 15, 2007 Shoreline

#### 2007 WSSCLS/NWSSAMT Spring Meeting

April 26-28, 2007 Kennewick

#### Northwest Medical Laboratory Symposium

October 24-27, 2007 Seattle

#### 14th Annual Clinical Laboratory Conference

November 2007 Seattle

Contact information for the events listed above can be found on page 2. The Calendar of Events is a list of upcoming conferences, deadlines, and other dates of interest to the clinical laboratory community. If you have events that you would like to have included, please mail them to ELABORATIONS at the address on page 2. Information must be received at least one month before the scheduled event. The editor reserves the right to make final decisions on inclusion.

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